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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Israel Hayom cited the belief of officials in Jerusalem that President Obama intends to introduce the general outline of his political plan for the Middle East before the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in New York in another month. According to the daily, reports from Washington seem to indicate that Obama will want

to capitalize on that dignified platform to set in motion the regional process he has spoken about in his speeches. Israel Hayom says that it is not clear where Obama hopes that progress will be made following the first stage of his plan (mutual Israeli and Palestinian moves).

Channel 2-TV quoted Vice PM and former IDF chief of staff Moshe Ya'alon as saying during a meeting of Jewish Leadership, the most right-wing Likud faction, that Peace Now and the Qelites are a Qvirus. Ya'alon also blasted the U.S. He was quoted as saying: QI, for one, am not afraid of the Americans. I believe that the Jews have the right to live anywhere in the land of Israel forever.

The media reported that his remarks sparked controversy among Israeli politicians. The media reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu has summoned Ya'alon for clarifications. Former Vice PM Haim Ramon told Israel Radio that Ya'alon is the true representative of Netanyahu's political views.

HaQaretz, The Jerusalem Radio, and HaQaretz reported that the U.S. has harshly criticized new Israeli restrictions placed on foreign nationals entering the West Bank via the Allenby Bridge, calling the new regulations Qunacceptable. A report on the restrictions appeared in HaQaretz last week. HaQaretz reported that earlier this week, a senior official at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv met with the head of the Foreign Ministry's consular division, Yigal Tzarfati, for clarifications on the new procedure, by which passports are stamped at the bridge with a directive limiting the bearer to areas of the Palestinian Authority only. The U.S. message reportedly was that such a procedure is harmful to U.S. citizens who come to the PA. HaQaretz reported that U.S. diplomats asked Tzarfati what the reason was for the restrictions. Leading media cited a note issued by the State Department saying: "We have let the government of Israel know that these restrictions unfairly impact Palestinian and Arab American travelers and are not acceptable. We have repeatedly told the government of Israel that the United States expects all American citizens to be treated equally, regardless of their national origin or other citizenship." The media reported that State Department Spokesman Ian Kelly reiterated the message. HaQaretz recalled that on August 14 the U.S. State Department renewed its travel advisory to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, drawing the attention of American travelers to Israel and the West Bank to the new procedure at the Allenby Bridge. HaQaretz reported that Interior Ministry officials at the borders also advise people concerned by the measure not to come to Israel through Ben-Gurion International Airport or the Sheikh Hussein Bridge crossing with Jordan near Beit She'an, rather only through the Allenby Bridge, frequently after they had been refused entry through the other entry points. HaQaretz quoted senior Foreign Ministry officials as saying that the Interior Ministry is behind the new procedures, and that the Foreign Ministry does not support it and does not understand its logic. "It is unclear what good it is and how it can be enforced," a Foreign Ministry official was quoted as saying. "All it does is damage Israel's image in its foreign relations," the official added.

HaQaretz has learned that a number of European embassies are planning to approach the Foreign Ministry to protest and seek clarifications. HaQaretz quoted Interior Ministry spokeswoman Sabine Haddad as saying that the procedure is based on a decision by the interior minister and the defense minister from 2006 that "any foreign national who wants to enter the Palestinian Authority must have a permit issued by the army, and entry is permitted only into PA territory."

The leading Internet news site Ynet reported that yesterday around 20 right-wing demonstrators, some of them dressed in traditional Native American garb, protested opposite the American Embassy in Tel Aviv against what they called U.S. interference in Israel's domestic affairs. The protesters carried signs comparing between the fate of Native Americans and the demand made on Israel to freeze settlement construction in the West Bank.

HaQaretz reported that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad are guarded by Israel's Shin Bet on some of their trips around the West Bank. According to an agreement between Israel and the PA, a team from Shin Bet's VIP security unit accompanies Abbas and Fayyad whenever they are in Area C, meaning that part of the West Bank that is under full Israeli control according to the Oslo Accords.

The media reported that Swedish Ambassador to Israel Elisabet Borsin Bonnier apologized for the article in Aftonbladet that claimed that IDF soldiers snatched body organs from Palestinians. The Jerusalem Post noted that Rafi Barak, the Foreign Ministry's senior Deputy Director-General, told Bonnier that Israel is bothered that the Swedish government has not publicly condemned the article.

The Jerusalem Post reported that more than 70 international human rights groups are calling for an end to voting practices in the U.N. Human Rights Council that have allowed countries responsible for human rights violations to be elected.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, for the first time, IDF troops will actively participate in an NATO operation in the Mediterranean Sea as part of the Active Endeavor maritime counter-terror operation.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Magen Dan outpost settlers alleged that the IDF forced removal of a caravan from their hilltop yesterday breached an agreement reached with the Elkana council to allow for its voluntary removal. A spokesman for the IDF's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories was quoted as saying that the people in Magen Dan were warned many times that if they did not abide by the agreement, the caravan would be forcibly removed. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that the key witness against the residents of the southern Hebron Hills Mitzpe Ashhal outpost is a Hamas activist who is banned from entry to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the four Labor rebel Knesset members -- Ophir Pines-Paz, Eitan Cabel, Yuli Tamir, and Amir Peretz -- will launch a new political movement next month, laying the groundwork for what could eventually become a new party that would aim to replace Labor.

Maariv quoted John Stork, the author of the Human Rights Watch report on IDF abuses during Operation Cast Lead, as saying that he no longer supports the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes in Munich. Maariv says that the article by its Op-Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini on this issue made waves in human rights groups around the world and especially in the U.S. Yediot reported that FM Avigdor Lieberman intends to conquer Africa (i.e. emulate the success of then FM Golda Meir's policies in the 50s and 60s) in his upcoming trip to five countries on the continent.

Haaretz reported that yesterday prominent religious Zionist rabbis published a manifesto opposing the proposed appointment to the Supreme Court of Beersheva District Court Judge Joseph (Sefi) Elon. They primarily objected to two decisions he made at the time of Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza. Haaretz quoted the judge's brother, right-wing politician Benny Elon, as saying that calling Joseph a leftist is nonsense. Media reported that yesterday flyers against Justice Minister Yaakov Neqeman were distributed at a right-wing meeting. Neqeman, who supports the appointment of Joseph Elon, was called the poodle of High Court of Justice President Dorit Beinisch.

Leading media reported that the composite state-of-the-economy index rose 1.2% in July, extending the recent upturn that had stemmed nearly a year of declines, according to figures released by the Bank of Israel yesterday. The figures confirm recent numbers that point to an improvement in the Israeli economy.

The electronic media reported that the popular entertainer Dudu Topaz, who was indicted for plotting attacks on top media personalities, killed himself in his prison cell.

Erratum: An item in the August 19 morning media review read: The Jerusalem Post quoted the Association for Civil Rights in Israel as saying that the state has demolished some 130 houses in unrecognized Israeli Bedouin communities since 1967. The date should have been: since the beginning of 2007.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

I. "The Boogie Man's Virulent Virus"

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (8/20): "We have been told recently that the Qsextet forum, Q of which [Vice Prime Minister Moshe QBoogieQ] Ya'alon is a senior member, is a serious group that embodies endless depths of good judgment and balance. Spare us these fairy tales... Even the bad old Netanyahu, with his Qthe Left has forgotten what it is to be Jewish,Q seems pretty normal next to them. QI'm not afraid of the Americans,Q Boogie said there, in the closed meeting with [far-Right Likud] Jewish Leadership activists who crowned him their leader. As a half-brained leader he is not afraid of Obama. But we are very much afraid of Boogie. This fear, which we haven't been able to shake off since we browsed through his autobiography, soared yesterday, leaving us scared to death. But most terrifying of all is the thought that until not long ago he was the chief of staff, our army's supreme commander. Now we know in whose hands Israel's security is entrusted."

II. "A Peace Horizon"

Senior commentator Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz (8/20): "The obvious revolution is economic. Trade between the Palestinian Authority and Israel has climbed 42 percent over the past year.... The hidden revolution is security oriented.... The military's dramatic lowering of its profile and reduction of friction did not lead to renewed terror. Things are currently quiet there, very quiet. The quiet is maintained by unprecedented cooperation between the IDF and the five Palestinian security branches.... The third revolution is in public awareness.... Arafat's death and Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip have freed the West Bank from Arafatism.... If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is booby-trapped by the settlers and if U.S. President Barack Obama follows in the footsteps of his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, an explosion would ensue.... But if U.S. special envoy George Mitchell develops a creative peace plan for his president, it may be possible to avoid past mistakes. This new plan must be based on Fayyad and his way. It must bring the Palestinians closer to a state in a decisive but realistic way. Instead of dealing with the conflict's unsolvable theology again, it must establish a practical dynamic of hope. Obama's challenge this autumn is to give the West Bank revolution a peace horizon, without pushing it backward to a reality of war."

III. "The Palestinian Position Is Important"

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in Ha'aretz (8/20): "Under the terms of binding international agreements, Israel has committed itself to recognizing the Qlegitimate rights of the Palestinian Arab nation.Q Menachem Begin was the first to do this. For many Zionists, and not just those who were schooled in the ideological camp of Herut [Likud's core movement], this was difficult. In contrast to what is thought in extreme rightist circles, this is not tantamount to relinquishing the Zionist narrative, it is a willingness to accept the legitimacy of a competing narrative and to seek a compromise. We only ask of the Palestinians that which we ourselves have done in the past.... The Palestinians fought the Jewish state, and if they truly and sincerely wish to forge peace, they must be willing to come to terms with the Jewish state, and to do so explicitly, without stuttering."

IV. "It's Time to talk to Fatah"

Former diplomat and former Labor Knesset member Colette Avital wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (8/20): "[Fatah's] congress also endorsed the 2002 Arab initiative. Interestingly, but not known to everyone, the initiative does not call for a right of return of the refugees. Here too, my humble advice to all the skeptics is to read the text as formulated. It clearly states that there should be a Qprincipled and agreed-upon solutionQ for the refugee problem. Finding the dark side of things provides good pretexts to those who refuse progress. The time has come for the Netanyahu government to renew the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, led by the only pragmatic Palestinian movement, Fatah. A

stronger Palestinian leadership, with a broader basis of popular support and a flexible platform, now opens better opportunities for serious negotiations.

IV. Obama's Main Man in the Middle East?

U.S.-Israel relations expert Professor Eytan Gilboa of Bar-Ilan University wrote in The Jerusalem Post (8/20): Seventy one senators politely wrote Obama on August 10 that he needs to better balance his strategy: they disagreed with his one-sided pressure on Israel, they praised the Netanyahu government for taking positive steps towards peace, and told Obama to obtain similar concessions from the Arab states. Obama has been praising Mubarak but the Egyptian president will have to work much harder to gain credibility and support both in Israel and with the American public. Obama's intention to formulate and announce yet another American blueprint for Arab-Israeli peace would be better served if he listened to American public opinion and to what seventy one senators wrote him just a few weeks ago. While Mubarak and the officials are reinforcing Obama's failing outlook, the senators, including the most influential from his own party, advised him to rethink and revise his approach.

VI. Between the President and the General

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: Gamal Mubarak, an economist and a banker by training, and who for more than ten years has been an unrelenting rising star in Egypt's governing party, has remained evasive. If pressured, he has hinted, he will have no choice but to run in the race, with the goal of winning, and to continue to serve his people. On the other side of the race, people-and particularly so officials in Washington and in the American media-have begun to speak about the veteran Mr. Mukhabarat [intelligence], General Omar Suleiman, as the next president of Egypt. In the past decade he has taken under his purview the direction of Egypt's political-security policy (Israel, Fatah-Hamas, the Shalit deal, relations with the international intelligence community, as well as other covert and sensitive missions), and he has an impressive record. Official Israel, one ought to note, have been taciturn. In closed conversations it is easy to see the preference of the entire intelligence community in the direction of the general. The long-standing relationship, the close ties, and the cooperation that is achieved far from the public's eye, are all accredited to him. Conversely, experts from the civilian institutions have recommended watching the ongoing preparatory process that Gamal has been undergoing. Despite the fact that this is a troubling question, there isn't a clear answer. When the subject at hand is the largest Arab state, our closest neighbor with which we signed our first peace accord, with a long list of shared enemies and interests-even if it is interesting and important, Israel cannot afford to take sides. Nor can Israel afford to be taken by surprise.

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